

15 April 1986

FILE ONLY

U.S. ORDERS CONTRAS TO REGISTER AS FOREIGN AGENTS
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WASHINGTON

The Justice Department said Tuesday it has ordered the chief Nicaraguan rebel group to register as a foreign agent, a ruling that requires the Contras to disclose sources of funding, contacts with U.S. officials and efforts to influence public opinion.

Department spokesman John Russell said that last month, Justice officials notified the United Nicaraguan Opposition, UNO, the rebels' political umbrella group, that it must register, but the organization has yet to file.

Russell said UNO must report on its activities in the United States because it represents a foreign entity - the Nicaraguan rebel movement - and is "trying to persuade Congress (and) engages in what is, more or less, propaganda."

Russell said UNO officials contend they have not been able to register during the past three weeks because of difficulty in bringing the group's leadership together.

Willful violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act can result in a fine of \$10,000 and five years' imprisonment, but normally the Justice Department simply orders compliance and takes no further action.

UNO, which was established last June, has offices in Washington and Miami and has been the main recipient of \$27 million in non-lethal aid that Congress approved last year for the rebels who are fighting Nicaragua's leftist government.

Russell said UNO will be required to report on its activities dating back to last June, when it was organized at White House urging.

The Justice Department ruling comes as President Reagan presses Congress for \$100 million in military and other aid for the Contras. Much of the money is expected to go through UNO.

UNO's three directors are Adolfo Calero, head of the largest rebel army, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, FDN; and two former Sandinista officials, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo.

The directors have met frequently with Reagan administration officials and members of Congress. The Associated Press reported Monday that the CIA, barred from aiding the Contras militarily, secretly funneled several million dollars to UNO and rebel supporters for political projects.

The registration law requires agents to reveal their sources of foreign funding and describe their contacts with U.S. officials and journalists. Although the law does not apparently apply to U.S. sources of money, UNO has reportedly received secret backing from third countries allied with the United States.

Bosco Matamoros, who has served as spokesman for both the FDN and UNO, declined comment on the Justice Department's ruling.

Congressional officials, insisting on anonymity, said the ruling means that UNO is "now barred from performing any lobbying activities" and may not legally even issue a press release.

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Those officials said that by March 25, UNO had been informed that the organization and its principals needed to register as foreign agents and that by March 31, all UNO principals had been visited by Justice officials.

The officials said UNO representatives had claimed that the State Department advised them last year that they did not have to register as foreign agents. But a State Department official, also insisting on anonymity, said that advice pertained only to the group's receipt of non-lethal aid, not to its other activities.

Contra rebels and some private American backers are also under federal investigation for alleged drug trafficking, gun-running and violation of the Neutrality Act which bars using U.S. territory to mount attacks on nations with which the United States is not at war.

The agent registration law, which dates back to the 1930s, was enacted to prevent foreign powers from conducting secret propaganda or lobbying efforts in the United States. Under the law, such efforts can take place but those who carry them out must file public reports every six months.